

Illinois Students Interview African National Congress

by Jenny Keller, Jeff Machota

For student activists in the United States the revolutionary struggles around the world seem far removed from the support work done in this country. In January of 1987, two members of the Divest Now Coalition at the University of Illinois, Jeff Machota and Jenny Keller, spent six weeks in Lusaka, Zambia -- the headquarters of the exiled South African liberation force, the African National Congress (ANC).

The following is an excerpt from their interview with Reggie Mpongo, Assistant Secretary for International Affairs of the ANC Youth Section and Lazarus Mphahlele, member of Publicity and Information in the National Youth Secretariat. This part of the interview focuses around the divestment movement, but an entire copy of the transcript covering a number of other topics is available by calling Jenny or Jeff at 217-344-8209.

Q: As Jan. 8th was the ANC's 75th Anniversary, what reflections do you have on the success and future of the ANC?

ANC: 75 years is almost a life span to any human being or any organization. Looking at our development from a purely African political movement, with basic traditionalist elements, to present ANC membership which is across the color lines, we think we have accomplished a lot. We have seen the horizon of freedom much closer than it has been before...

In Our approach, even in our declaring the year 1987 as "Year of People's Power," we believe that our efforts should be to further break down the administrative structures of the regime, to develop the rudiments of people's organizations and to develop people's power itself. In the last 10 to 20 years we have been able to build a broad unity; we have begun to create a crack within the seemingly homogeneous white community. The Na-

tionalist Party is disintegrating. At the same time within the Black community you also see the realignment of forces for change... the main forces which we regard as revolutionary forces in South Africa have managed to set the momentum going.

We noted in 1985 and throughout last year, the big companies, monopolies in South Africa, beginning to reach out to the ANC to find out which positive role they can play in the process of change... We have got no illusions that they are going for justice's sake, they are preparing their own future so that when this side wins they have made their contribution...

Q: What role do you see the divestment movement playing to support the liberation forces in South Africa?

ANC: I think we first have to express our admiration for the activities of the anti-apartheid movement in the United States, particularly in the past five years. We also have to express our admiration particularly of the student movement and different campuses in the divestment campaign. We know that in the last few weeks several US companies have started pulling out of South Africa... this creates a certain confusion for the regime. The regime all of a sudden begins to realize that the threat of sanctions is a reality.

This present climate we are getting would not have been there without the strength of the anti-apartheid movement around the world. It was not long ago in 1986 when the US said they wouldn't meet any "terrorist" organization, but they sent their ambassador here to contact our leaders... and finally extended an invitation for our President to meet with George Schultz. This we see as an opportunity in that the US is prepared to talk and relate to the ANC. This is a result of the efforts made by the anti-apartheid



movement.

We always emphasize to our people that a distinction should be made between the American people and the ruling circles in the US. Now that the ruling class is trying to get a place we will have to exploit it and use it to the benefit of our own struggle. We have also said, as a movement, that we are ready to cooperate with whoever is interested in the solution of the South African question, but not politicians should dictate to us how to resolve our problems in South Africa.

Q: How do you recommend dealing with the bogus "withdrawals" from South Africa of corpora-

tions like IBM, GM and Exxon?

ANC: The movement must demand the total breakdown of trade and economic relations with South Africa. The new tactic which some companies are using to ship military hardware to Honduras, or some other repressive regime, then to be shipped to South Africa, must be monitored. To withdraw but still provide the technological know-how ruins the effort.

On our own part we have our own sanctions which we are prepared to apply. If they don't listen we will have a way of sabotaging their industries which are keeping the regime going. It is for them to make a decision.

Chicago "Freedom Rides"

by Chris Gagliano

During the plenary session of the Fall PSN Conference, James Brame from the Illinois Alliance of Black Student Organizations (IABSO) raised a proposal that the PSN mobilize students to help in the re-election campaign of Mayor Harold Washington.

As a result of this resolution being passed, the Chicago PSN met with members of the IABSO to develop a plan for bringing students to Chicago to help with the campaign. We compiled a study packet on the election consisting of various articles, statistics, maps and other literature which we sent out to various PSN and IABSO organizations to help educate students on the critical nature of Mayor Washington's re-election campaign. (Copies of the packet are still available from the Chicago PSN). We set aside several dates for students to come to Chicago and began calling this mobilization "Chicago Freedom Rides" to link our effort historically to the Freedom Rides of the early and mid 1960s in which students travelled to the South to fight Jim Crow and racism.

On January 31 and February 14 IABSO and PSN brought students to Chicago. The days drew roughly 25 and 35 people respectively, with Black students representing more than half on both days. Particularly exciting was the participation of a large contingent from the University

of Illinois Champaign-Urbana. Some of these students had travelled to Forsyth County, Georgia to march against the Ku Klux Klan. Their attendance helped to emphasize two of our themes: 1) A victory for Harold Washington is a defeat for racism; 2) The historical reference to the Freedom Rides.

Each day began at the University of Illinois-Chicago (UIC) with an educational panel which discussed the historic significance of Washington's election in the context of political empowerment for Chicago's oppressed, primarily, but not exclusively, the Afro-American community. Speakers examined the legacy of "The Machine" which was the Chicago political system that enabled a tiny powerful elite to rule the city for decades by means of corruption and coercion. The panel brought students up to date on how Washington's victory in 1983 signaled a dramatic power realignment in city politics and how four years of the Washington administration have served the needs of the previously "locked out" members of the community. Finally, panel members explained the current issues of the 1987 election and exposed Jane Byrne, "Fast" Eddy, Vrdolyak and others who have stood in the way of progress.

Following the educational sessions, we separated into groups, each going to a different regional Washington campaign of-



In September, Nicaragua's Minister of Health Dora Maria Tellez visited Chicago as part of a tour of U.S. cities. Above, Tellez is greeted by Mayor Harold Washington. Her

visit was sponsored by Central America Medical Aid and cosponsored by numerous other groups, including Progressive Students at UIC.

face, including the South Side (Black community), the West Side (Black community), the Near Northwest Side (Latino and white community) and the Lakefront (the city's most racially "integrated" area). By sending people to these various areas of the city we were able to experience the diversity of Chicago. At each of the offices members of the campaign staff taught a brief "crash course" on door-to-door canvassing for the Mayor. After lunch we formed teams and began knocking on doors to sell Harold Washington's progressive agenda to voters.

After about four hours of hard grassroots work, we reconvened at UIC to dis-

cuss our experiences. Overall, students seemed enthused about the election and proud to have been able to make a contribution. Although we encountered a few incidents of white voters slamming their door, the responses were overwhelmingly positive. We found widespread and strong support for the Mayor on the South and West Sides, and relatively good support from the other areas. People found that the ability to speak directly with a large number of voters gave them a deeper understanding of the Washington campaign, Chicago politics and the different communities of people within Chicago.